News From the Wyoming Department of Health

Monday, April 10, 2006

State Suicide Prevention Conference Planned for Casper

CHEYENNE – The Wyoming Department of Health and the State Suicide Prevention Task Force are planning a major statewide suicide prevention conference for May 17-19 in Casper at the Ramkota Hotel.

With a theme of "Building Bridges to a Better Tomorrow," the conference will bring together more than 20 national suicide prevention experts to discuss the public health epidemic of suicide with a special emphasis on preventing youth suicide.

Wyoming has the nation's highest rate of completed suicides with a 2002 rate of 21/100,000 persons, nearly twice the national average of 11/100,000. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among Wyoming residents between the ages of 15 to 24, with about one-quarter of all suicide deaths in the state occurring among that population.

According to Wyoming Department of Health Director Dr. Brent Sherard, the conference reflects a commitment to confronting the silent epidemic in Wyoming. "I've personally known individuals who have taken this tragic step, and the impact on those left behind - including family, friends, and coworkers – can be devastating. The real tragedy is that suicide is preventable in most cases with proper detection and treatment," Sherard said.

Keith Hotle, the Department of Health's suicide prevention program manager, described the conference as the logical next step in the state's suicide prevention efforts. "We began implementing the Suicide Prevention Program authorized by the legislature in 2005," Hotle said. "We are working to increase public awareness about suicide in Wyoming and to reduce suicide by identifying and treating those who are at-risk."

Keynote conference speakers include Charles Curie, head of the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA); Dr. Alan Berman, executive director of the American Association of Suicidology; Dr. David Litts, associate director of the Suicide Prevention Resource Center; and Jerry Reed, executive director of the Suicide Prevention Action Network. Special presentations are also scheduled by University of Wyoming Football Coach Joe Glenn and Ann Simpson, wife of former U.S. Senator Alan Simpson.

"To have all of these national experts and leading professionals come together in Wyoming is simply remarkable," Hotle said. Speaker topics include youth prevention programs, suicide prevention throughout the life-cycle, clinical assessment and screening, suicide and the older adult, coping with grief, child and adolescent depression, the psychological autopsy, rural challenges to prevention and communicating with the suicidal individual.

The conference is open to anyone interested in learning about suicide, prevention and intervention, methods or survivor issues. Continuing education credits will be available for law enforcement officers and corrections staff, mental health professionals, nurses and medical personnel and educators. Brochures and registration forms are available from the Wyoming Department of Health's Mental Health Division at (307) 777-7094 or on the Wyoming Suicide Prevention website at http://wdh.state.wy.us/wspi/index.asp.

####